

APRIL 10, 1951
659th BROADCAST

Illinois U Library Town Meeting



BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

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Does Modern Art Make Sense?

Moderator, GEORGE V. DENNY, JR.

Speakers

THOMAS HART BENTON PERRY T. RATHBONE
STUART DAVIS



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Published by THE TOWN HALL, Inc., New York 18, N. Y.

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 50  \$5.00 A YEAR; 15c A COPY



Town Meeting

VOL. 16 No. 50



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The Broadcast of April 10, 1951, from 9:00 to 9:45 P.M., EST, over the American Broadcasting Network, originated in Urbana, Illinois, under the auspices of the Festival of Contemporary Arts of the University of Illinois.

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The account of the meeting reported in this Bulletin was transcribed from recordings made of the actual broadcast and represents the exact content of the meeting as nearly as such mechanism permits. The publishers and printer are not responsible for the statements of the speakers or the points of view presented.

THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

THOMAS HART BENTON—Artist, began his career as a cartoonist on the *Joplin (Mo.) American* in 1906. Two years later he became a student at the Academie Julien, Paris, France, where he remained until 1911. He became a professional painter in 1912. From 1935 to 1941, Mr. Benton served as Director of Painting at the Kansas City (Mo.) Art Institute. He is represented by murals in the Whitney Museum and the New School for Social Research, New York City. He has also painted murals for the states of Indiana and Missouri.

PERRY T. RATHBONE — Director of the City Art Museum, St. Louis, Mo., since August, 1940, and author of *Mississippi Panorama*. Mr. Rathbone's first museum connection after graduating from Harvard in 1934 was with the Detroit Institute of Arts, where he served as educational assistant until 1936. During the same period he was an art instructor at Wayne University, Detroit, Mich. From 1936 to 1939, he worked as curator of Alger House, the suburban branch of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and as research assistant to Director William R. Valentiner. He succeeded Dr. Valentiner as Director of the Masterpieces of Art Exhibition, New York World's Fair, 1939-40. Mr. Rathbone is the biographer of Max Beckmann, and has contributed numerous articles to art publications. He is a member of the American Association of Museums and the Association of Art Museums.

STUART DAVIS—Artist, has done easel painting in New York, Gloucester, Mass., and Paris, France, since 1913. He has painted murals for Radio City Music Hall, Radio Station WNYC, Communications Building, N. Y. World's Fair, Indiana University, and the University of Georgia. His paintings are on permanent exhibition in museums throughout the country, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Memorial Gallery, Washington, D.C., and the Los Angeles Museum. Besides his professional paintings are on permanent exhibition in museums throughout the country, recently teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York. Among his many prizes are the Norman Wait Harris Prize, awarded by the Art Institute of Chicago, 1948, and Second Prize in the La Tausca Competition, 1948.

Town Meeting is published weekly at 32 S. Fourth St., Columbus 15, Ohio, by The Town Hall, Inc., New York 18, New York. Send subscriptions and single copy orders to Town Hall, New York 18, N.Y.

Subscription price, \$5.00 a year, (Canada, \$6.00); six months, \$3.00, (Canada, \$3.50); eight weeks, \$1.00, (Canada, \$1.20); 15c a single copy. Entered as second-class matter May 9, 1942, at the Post Office at Columbus, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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Does Modern Art Make Sense?

Moderator Denny:

Good evening, neighbors. Tonight we invite you to take an excursion with us into the ever widening field of art. Our tour directors will be two distinguished American artists who hold sharply opposing views on what is good and what is bad in modern art, and an eminent museum director whose opinion seems to stand squarely between those of the two artists.

Stuart Davis of New York City is one of the best-known spokesmen for modernists in contemporary art. His own works are in permanent exhibit in most of the leading museums of the country. He's a staunch supporter of the moderns and is here tonight to tell you why. We are very happy to present Mr. Stuart Davis.

Mr. Davis:

My position, Mr. Denny, is that only modern art makes sense in twentieth century terms. Modern art is contemporary, yes; but not all contemporary art is modern, and the same applies to the contemporary audience. Too many of our leading and most honored citizens suffer from acute anemia in their attitude toward art. In matters of social welfare, business, education, they come on like gangbusters, but where art is concerned, they either shift to neutral or try to back up and escape into the past.

This craven flight from art reality has served to congest traffic on the avenue of progress of modern art, but never to detour it. I say this as a matter of personal knowledge. From the Armory Show in New York City in 1913,

I have participated in its continuous development. I have seen an enormous growth in the audience for modern art, in spite of temporary regressions and isolated cases of desertion by artists, as when people like my old friend Tom Benton have said, "I used to be an abstract artist myself."

Actually, to ask whether modern art makes sense is the same as asking whether modern thought makes sense; whether modern scientific method and a decent standard of living make sense; whether the principle of the integrity of the individual and freedom of communication make sense; and ultimately, whether Western civilization in the twentieth century makes sense. These are the things we modern artists have to work with, and how much sense we make with them is entirely a matter of how much sense we've got.

The character of modern thought is most easily apparent in the way we live today. This includes modern art. Its popularity is apparent in its effect on every aspect of American life—in industrial design, in the packages you buy at your drugstore, in the shape of your car, your house, your clothes, the music you listen to—all reflect the ideas of modern art. However, its value as applied art or as decoration is not its prime value.

Painting, as abstract art—pure art, if you will, Mr. Benton—has popular acceptance because more and more people have a chance to enjoy it today. It looks different from past art because the modern artist acts in a society that looks at life differently. Since public

participation and appreciation of art are far greater than at any time in history, there has been a decentralization of patronage and a greater variety in art content, subject, and style. Today, you, the American people, are the patrons of art, rather than a few isolated individuals as in the past.

Many people who should know better, Mr. Benton, have mistaken this diversity for an impoverishment of content. They have lapsed into confusing free individual expression with intellectual and spiritual poverty. Their patron-father complex is usually teamed up with a complaint that the images of abstract art are in a private language, which no one but the artist can understand. The next time someone tries to sell you this line, find out what art dialect he is trying to use as a universal solvent before deciding.

Art is a visual language that has to be learned by artists and public alike, and language is not a static affair. You have to learn to see, as you have to do to read and speak. Actually, the non-representational idiom of abstract art has a more universal basis in everyday color and shape experience than the representational idiom. But the two do not exclude each other.

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Mr. Davis, for this brief comprehensive picture of modern art. You've made Mr. Benton very uncomfortable, although he's smiling as he wiggles in his chair.

If Mr. Benton had chosen politics instead of art as a career, he probably would have been a United States senator from Missouri, like his great-uncle, one of

the pioneers who helped to develop the Middlewest. Mr. Benton is known for five distinguished paintings that hang in various buildings in Indiana and Missouri. Although he continues to work diligently at his paintings six or eight hours a day, he is an avid student of public questions and a staunch believer that art should reflect both the spirit and the culture of its time. Mr. Benton, we are eager to hear why you differ so sharply with your old friend Mr. Stuart Davis. Thomas Hart Benton of Kansas City.

Mr. Benton:

One of the chief differences between me and my old friend Mr. Davis is that Mr. Davis is a high-brow and I'm simply a Missourian. And I'll show you now why we make that difference.

Mr. Davis says right at the start that modern art is the only art that makes sense in twentieth-century terms. Now let's see what the terms of the 20th century are.

We began in 1907 with a major depression and failure of capitalist society. In 1914, we had a major world war. We had a big depression in 1929, which practically destroyed the Western society. We had another major world war—a devastating one—to follow that, and we are still feeling the effects of it today. The terms by which men live over the world have not been defined. We are in an utter state of confusion. I will agree with Mr. Davis that modern art represents those terms—the terms of utter confusion. (*Applause*)

Now, let's see. We'll go a little further—I'll have to make my talk up as I go along. A little further, Mr. Davis said—I'm reading him and quoting him—

Actually, to ask whether modern art makes sense is the same as asking whether modern thought makes sense; whether modern scientific method makes sense." All right, modern thought has produced again an absolute division of political opinion and social belief throughout the world. So modern thought has failed in a human sense to make us a decent life in the twentieth century.

Now, let's take scientific method. Scientific method is all right. It has produced a few nice things. It has also produced a lot of commercial products which have enslaved you people. Half of you people, through scientific method, are slaves of gadgets.

In addition to that, it has produced the atom bomb which threatens to destroy every one of you. So that I will say that modern science has failed in the twentieth century to prove that it was of any human value whatsoever. I am ready to knock the scientists in the head.

Now a little bit later, my good friend Stuart Davis says, "Today," he says to you people here, you middle Illinois people sitting here, "you, the American people, are the patrons of art, rather than a few isolated individuals, as in the past." Well, now let's just see that. Who are the ones who patronize and support modern art? The first place we have to go, of course, is not to you people out here, but to the sons and the daughters—mostly the daughters—of nineteenth century millionaires who have a lot of surplus capital and who can afford to put it out amusing themselves with obscure issues. There we have that.

Now, the center of modern art is located in Rockefeller Center in New York. It could not go on

there without the support of the Rockefeller fortunes. It is also supported by American magazines which represent the most conservative opinions in America. Why do they support it? For the simple reason that they can afford to hide their absolutely conservative opinions by being very radical about something that doesn't count.

Now, let's see here. I've got to have something to say here myself, but I'll say one more thing about Mr. Davis. No, I'll let that go. I don't want to do him any more damage.

Let me put out something that will damage *me*, so as to give them something to use to crack back at me. I have another attitude toward these artists. When I am condemning the modern arts of Mr. Davis, unfortunately I have to condemn the academic arts also, because most of them have not been able to get in touch with life—with life in America.

Now I see art as an expression of the conditions and the beliefs and the behaviors and the whole spiritual content of a civilization. I mean what people believe, what they think, how they are going to act, and so forth, and also the physical conditions. It must express something, in that the culture is at least agreed upon, in order to be able to function within the culture. Now, all the great artists of the past have so functioned—practically all. There are a few exceptions.

In the last 100 years, art has been moving away from human meaning. That started a hundred years ago. Here, with my old pupil Jack Pollock you get the final step away from meaning. Even the professor could not tell what the composition was. Even

the compositional meaning is lost.

I don't think that you can have meanings which you as spectators can share unless some of the terms are recognizable. If modern art now wants to progress—I have no objections to the idioms—if it wants to progress, either it will have to get in touch with a symbolism which all you people understand, or it will have to represent things that you can recognize and on which you can build your ideas.

My view of art is that the artist is not of the slightest importance. The person that is important is the spectator.

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Tom Benton, and even if you did hesitate a little, we are glad you threw away your script and just talked to us. Well, we have the makings of a great debate here.

Now let's see what our museum director has to say on this subject. Does modern art make sense, or does the twentieth century make sense, Mr. Perry Rathbone? Mr. Rathbone began his work in the museum field as soon as he finished his graduate work at Harvard University—first in Detroit, next at New York's World's Fair in 1939, and since August, 1940, he has been director of the City Art Museum in St. Louis. We are very happy to welcome to Town Meeting Mr. Perry Rathbone of St. Louis.

Mr. Rathbone:

My colleagues, Mr. Davis and Mr. Benton, have expressed themselves very well and very positively on the question of this evening, and I believe I find myself in the position of most of you in the audience. In other words, I agree

in part with the views of both gentlemen, but only in part.

I do not agree with Mr. Davis that modern art would make more sense if more of our citizens did not suffer from acute anemia in their attitude toward art. And neither do I agree with Mr. Benton that modern art is the exclusive darling of the coterie who reads the same magazines, or that you need to have a rich grandfather or a rich father to appreciate it.

I have been asked a specific question in this discussion, and that is "Must art make sense in order to be enjoyed?" It seems to me a very good sound question. By "making sense," I might elucidate, we intend to say, "Does the work of art have meaning?" At least, that's what it means to me.

My answer is yes, that it must make sense, it must have meaning to be enjoyed. And by that I mean it must have meaning for you to enjoy it, but not necessarily for everybody. All modern art may make sense as a visual experience, and it can therefore be enjoyed up to that point, just as you might be intrigued or take a momentary pleasure in the chance inkstains on your blotter. But this is not a deep or a very moving experience. We can therefore say that the more meaning a work of art has, the more it can be enjoyed.

Human beings, in my mind, and I think in yours, are more interested in human beings than in anything else in life. Much modern art leaves human beings and our world of nature entirely out of consideration. I speak of art abstraction—art that is merely imaginary form and pattern.

Art has been a revelation of life through the ages, and that

what has come to be expected of art. Much modern art, Mr. Davis, is so stingy with its revelation of life that it can be said not to make sense, or to have little meaning.

Modern art to me is that which differs markedly from the enfeebled repetitions of the art of the preceding age. It is the art which employs new concepts, new visual ways of recording experiences, new techniques. To apply the acid test, I submit that modern art is the art that has been, is now, and would again be ruthlessly suppressed—eradicated, if possible—by a political dictator.

My temperate view of this question is no doubt derived from my profession. In a museum, we are dealing with the art of all ages. Daily contact with that art teaches us that art is boundless, that the exotic, the imaginary, the fantastic—those qualities that abound in modern art and often baffle us—have existed in the arts since time out of mind, and they are only making a reappearance in our time, and not a debut.

It has been said that the purpose of art is to express feeling and transmit understanding. I think that it is fair for you and for me to apply this principle to modern art. The modern art that I enjoy, that has meaning for me, I believe satisfies this principle. The modern art that does not, frankly irritates me, and this the more so because I think it is natural for men to admire above other creations those things that are the product of their own time and civilization. To me, then, modern art can both delight and frustrate. I do not pretend that I can satisfactorily explain the understanding that is in every case transmitted by a work of art, and I

cannot give you any rules for judging it. I think it is fundamental that you keep your eyes open and your mind unprejudiced. And in the last analysis, since art is created instinctively, it will also be judged by your instinct.

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Mr. Rathbone, for throwing the ball so gracefully back into our laps. Now, let's have a little discussion among you speakers before we take the questions from the audience. Mr. Davis, it's time we heard from you after that assault by your old friend, Mr. Tom Benton.

Mr. Davis: Well, I couldn't understand why he associates all the troubles of the twentieth century and the century preceding—why he associates them with the glories of those centuries, among which happen to be modern paintings. Surely that great painting in the Chicago Art Institute, "La Grande Jatte" by Seurat, is not a plague of any kind.

Mr. Benton: Mr. Davis, the painting that you spoke of by Seurat in the Chicago Museum was painted in the nineteenth century.

Mr. Davis: Yes, well, these daughters you blame came out of the nineteenth century.

Mr. Benton: The daughters, yes. They came out of the nineteenth century. And, of course, modern art, I think, clearly expresses the individualism of the nineteenth century, which is best expressed by the whims of high society.

Mr. Davis: Well, I'm also a nineteenth century product, but I make these wonderful paintings.

Mr. Benton: The trouble is you live in the twentieth. (*Laughter*)

Mr. Denny: Your question for Mr. Davis, Mr. Benton?

Mr. Benton: No, no. I want to get Mr. Rathbone on here, because he hit something that bothered me a little bit. Let's get this quite sure. He said that a painting must have sense. Of course. Now, I want to know what you mean there—whether it should have public or private sense, because we may be agreeing on this, but I want to find out whether we are.

Mr. Rathbone: I think it's too much to expect that any work of art should make sense to all people, and therefore my answer to Mr. Benton is that it's got to make sense to someone. It's got to make sense to you, but it doesn't necessarily have to make sense to everybody you know.

Mr. Benton: May I comment on that? The behavior of an insane man makes sense to him. We can't judge any work by the way the person who behaves judges it. You ought to have some kind of more public reference.

Mr. Denny: What do you say to that, Mr. Rathbone?

Mr. Rathbone: I quite agree with Mr. Benton, but I think it's impossible for the artists in our time to express any common philosophy because there is no common philosophy to which we all subscribe. And these are the horns of a dilemma. And I think it behooves us to show them patience and understanding, if we can.

Mr. Benton: I want to say one thing now. I want to really show that I do agree. There are really a lot of things on which I agree with Mr. Davis, and I do agree partially here with Mr. Rathbone. One of the things is that I know that eventually the meaning from a painting—I told you before that it's the spectator who makes the

meaning. Consequently, every painting has to have some private meaning to have any meaning at all. However, you as individuals can't find these meanings. You won't get private meanings unless you recognize the symbolism. The painting of the Renaissance of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was understood because the symbolism was understood. Paintings are just as good, everybody knows, as modern things. Actually, the idioms of modern art to which Mr. Davis subscribes I'd have no objection to whatever, if they brought more public meaning.

Mr. Davis: Well, I'd just like to ask Mr. Rathbone this. I agree with much of what he says, but he said something to the effect that a nonrepresentative idiom, such as abstract art, has a very specific limitation intrinsic to it. Did I understand you correctly in that?

Mr. Rathbone: Yes, you did.

Mr. Davis: Well, would you explain a little more?

Mr. Rathbone: I think that we all agree that all art of every age and culture is basically abstract—that it exists on an abstract framework which is part of its strength and is what makes it endure as a significant expression. I think that to create works of art that are merely abstract, you do not provide enough enjoyment—we were talking about the enjoyment of art a few minutes ago—you do not provide enough enjoyment. I maintain that modern art in many cases is stingy with what it will give the spectator.

Mr. Davis: Well, the nonrepresentative means, you associate them with the poverty of content, but you wouldn't do that with musical

language, which is also non-representative, would you?

Mr. Rathbone: No.

Mr. Benton: May I say something about the musical language? Through the long history of background, the cry, the tone is connected with every kind of human emotion. Colors are connected occasionally—you have the blue of the sky; the green of the world. Now those colors might call up such things, but their emotional intensity in no way comes as it does by the cry. For instance, if you were alone in a forest at night, the moon may be shining there—you see it shining, the light is there. That may give you some

satisfaction. But some little touch of a cry that you don't know or a noise you don't know produces more emotions in you than anything you can see. So you have a basic emotional thing in music. That's why it's the greatest of the arts.

Mr. Davis: I think it's the greatest of the arts, too, along with painting.

Mr. Denny: All right; he still stands pat.

Mr. Benton: I have to defend myself, too. I won't wash painting out, either.

Mr. Denny: Let's take a few questions from the audience.

QUESTIONS, PLEASE!

Man: This is to Mr. Davis. If the man in the street prefers representational painting, does the artist have an obligation to do it for him?

Mr. Davis: Well, the artist is the man in the street; he's one of the men in the street. And the man in the street has all kinds of interests, all kinds of degrees of information. Not all artists are alike. Not all people in the street are alike. You cannot put some standard for modern painting which will be applicable for all people. As I said in my opening remarks, art has to be learned by artists and public alike.

The fact that we have an art called abstract art today is an established fact. We don't have to speculate on it—whether it should be or should not be. It is. We have it, and it is enjoyed by thousands of people. It does not exclude the representative painting, illustration, or anything of that kind. We have that as a concomitant. The man on the street

has more art available to him today than at any time and a greater variety, and he chooses on the level on which he is capable to choose.

Mr. Benton: I would like to comment on Mr. Davis' speech. He has said that the man in the street has more art, more different kinds of art offered to him now than ever in the history of man's life. I expect that's true. The only trouble is that he doesn't want any of it, because it has no meaning in the sense that we have agreed on—public meaning.

Let me ask this audience a question. I think we can make some decision about this meaning right here. Suppose all those who believe that modern art has meaning and provides sufficient sense say yes. (*Cries of yes.*) All those who believe that modern art does not have sufficient meaning say no. (*Cries of no.*) I guess that's pretty easy. I thought I had that in my hand. (*Laughter*)

Mr. Denny: All right. You see

what a well divided audience this is, Mr. Benton. The lady over here.

Lady: Mr. Rathbone, we're just beginning to appreciate Scott Fitzgerald. Won't we see the sense in our contemporary painting in another 25 years?

Mr. Rathbone: I don't think that necessarily follows. It has certainly followed ever since—to make use of a very familiar example—the day of van Gogh. Just because an artist is unappreciated in his day does not necessarily mean that he's going to be appreciated in 25 years.

Man: Mr. Benton, do you think Mr. Jack Pollock could have achieved his present position as a nonobjective painter if he had not first had a thorough training in the more traditional techniques?

Mr. Benton: I hate to comment on my contemporaries. I absolutely will refuse to do that. Jack Pollock was a student of mine, and I'm just going to let that slide because I'm loyal to my students.

Mr. Denny: All right. That's a very noble expression. Let's take another question for you.

Man: Mr. Benton, why should the contemporary artist appeal to the lowest common denominator of his audience, as you do, rather than attempt to raise the general aesthetic response?

Mr. Denny: That is what I call a loaded question.

Mr. Benton: I will answer that question. It is not I who have said that art should appeal to the lowest denominator. Of course I do not. I am appealing to this very intelligent audience. I wouldn't call that the lowest common denominator. I am appealing for an art which will have meaning.

Man: Mr. Rathbone, has every generation had its problem of

modern art, or is it something peculiar to our peculiar age?

Mr. Rathbone: No, I would say it was not entirely peculiar to our age. The annals of art are filled with examples of artists who were not appreciated in their own time. I think that the condition has been very much aggravated by our age but it is not peculiar to our time.

Mr. Denny: All right, thank you. The lady on the aisle here.

Lady: To Mr. Davis, please. Does the nonobjective artist paint to express his own feelings, or to provide a medium from which the viewer may express his own feelings?

Mr. Davis: The artist paints to express his own ideas and thoughts, but as a person he is not an isolated individual. His ideas and thoughts come from the same subject matter, the same environment, the same concern, as that of large sections of the public, so that his communication, while primarily personal, is understandable to a great many people and represents identical interests with theirs.

Mr. Denny: Mr. Davis, just help out the puzzled moderator a little bit. This term "nonobjective artist" is linked with a question such as the lady asked back there. How could a nonobjective artist paint a nonobjective piece with any objective?

Mr. Davis: Well, I'm not responsible for the term "non-objective." I'm going to let it slide. *(Laughter)*

Mr. Denny: Isn't that a very wicked kind of term to perpetrate on a unsuspecting public, "non-objective" painting?

Mr. Davis: I thoroughly agree with you. And I include abstract art as an undesirable term and non-descriptive of the content of modern painting.

Lady: This is for Mr. Benton. Just you run down our whole way of life just to justify your stand on this question, which you said didn't matter any way?

Mr. Benton: That's a pretty good logical question, but I have not been running down the way of life. I didn't make the twentieth century. That's the whole trouble with that question.

Man: Mr. Rathbone, do you believe modern art represents some type of internal conflict in the artist?

Mr. Rathbone: Well, I think that's a rather broad question, and I would be impossible to answer except in a broad way. I think that there is an internal conflict in every artist, and there is in almost every human being.

Man: Mr. Davis, do you think it takes as much talent to produce concoction of abstract or modern art, as it's called, as it does to concoct something of representative art? I mean it takes no talent to make ink blots on a blotter.

Mr. Denny: "Concoct" is an ugly word. Now let's change it to paint."

Mr. Davis: Well, if your question is whether an abstract painting, so-called, is easier to do than representational painting, if that's what your question is, the answer is no, it is not easier to do. I know from my own experience.

Mr. Benton: May I make a comment on that? The question here, though, is that when Mr. Davis says that the nonobjective painting is not easy to do, what he really means is that it's not easy to do a *good* one. Now, that I'll agree with perfectly, but the only trouble is that we're back to that question of who is going

to judge what's good or bad? I said before that the lunatic judges his own behavior as good. I don't mean to imply that Mr. Davis is a lunatic. (*Laughter*)

Mr. Denny: All right. Mr. Davis is glad you eliminated him from that category. The lady over here.

Lady: Mr. Rathbone, please. Composition, color, lines and shapes—aren't these the basis of any paintings, whether abstract, modern or realistic? Can't one enjoy these as abstracts without having any relation to recognizable objects?

Mr. Rathbone: I quite agree, you can; and when you mention those elements, you're mentioning the language of art. That's what art is made up of. I simply contend that your pleasure in abstract art is a limited one, whereas your pleasure in more profound expressions, expressions that have to do with life in human beings, is a deeper, broader pleasure.

Mr. Benton: I wish to help answer that question about the possibility of responding to the mere material qualities of a thing. Now, on this I think Mr. Rathbone and Mr. Davis and I are in absolutely full agreement. You do have to meet any painting, no matter when it was made, through the material out of which it has been constructed. After all, we do put this stuff together and you only enter into its meaning through its material.

Now, I've talked down modern art all this time, but I'm going to give it one word. I think it's done some good even in this busted-down twentieth century. It has made us aware of the fact that the materials of which arts are made are consequential in their ends.

Man: Mr. Davis, how do you distinguish modern art from primitive art, especially since they both look the same?

Mr. Davis: Well, that isn't a question, that's a conclusion. You announce that they're both the same. I don't think they are the same. There are contemporary primitives, just as the primitives of the past were contemporaries of their own time, but not all modern art and not all modern people are primitive.

Man: This is for Mr. Benton: Don't you think that abstract art is the only type that allows a person to express individuality as an artist?

Mr. Benton: I have spent the evening saying no.

Man: Mr. Benton, to get back to symbolism for a minute. Can't there be a new symbolism established by an artist which the public must learn to understand?

Mr. Benton: I have also spent the evening saying that it is not the artist who is important, but the spectator. My contention here is that until the artist is actually bringing out qualities that are within his culture he can't possibly be significant. Now, of course the artist is going to make new symbolism; that is, if art lasts in the world, or anything else. I don't believe we're going to wipe the arts out. And eventually I imagine out of these various idioms that people are practicing with now, and over which they fight each other even worse than Mr. Davis and I are fighting each other, there is something that will come. Men may return, in some respects, to a representational art. Actually I have no objections to a decorative art. They've been made through all history. An art

without meaning—without specific meaning. They have decorative value and use and they have values—do I dare say in themselves, after all that I've said—but I'll let it go at that. There are certain values in things perhaps for themselves.

Mr. Denny: Mr. Benton, suppose I ask you the question that Mr. Davis didn't answer? Is there any object in nonobjective art?

Mr. Benton: I think you and Mr. Davis brought this out here pretty well that that's utter nonsense. Those are the terms. I don't think that would quite apply always to the stuff that the nonobjective painters make. Now, for instance, let's get back to this former student of mine. I won't commit myself to saying that I like them. Now this is, I believe what they call nonobjective art. Their terms change so fast, maybe there is another name for it now. But I don't think those names make the slightest bit of difference, after all. Look at the names of modern art. Begin with the term "Fauvism." What does that mean? A bunch of wild beasts. Take the term "Dadaism." I don't know what that means. I could name more, but I'll let someone else do it.

Man: Mr. Rathbone, as a museum director, do you find most people doubt the sincerity of artists who paint in nonrepresentational manner?

Mr. Rathbone: I find that that is quite widespread. I myself don't agree with it, but I think that there is no question that many people do doubt the sincerity of nonrepresentational painters. I myself think that almost every artist is sincere, but I do also

feel that some nonrepresentational painters have taken refuge in that liom because they find they haven't got anything to say about life.

Mr. Denny: All right, thank you very much. Mr. Benton was reading with his chin ready to comment, but our time is about up, so I want to thank Mr. Perry

Rathbone, Mr. Stuart Davis, and Thomas Hart Benton for giving us the benefit of your views on this question. And our warm thanks to our hosts and to Dr. George Stoddard, President of this great institution, the University of Illinois. So plan to be with us next week and every week at the sound of the Crier's Bell.



THE LISTENER TALKS BACK

"HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH ORGANIZED CRIME?"

Program of April 3

Speakers

Senator Lester C. Hunt

Governor Val Peterson

Howard Whitman



Each week we print as many significant comments on the preceding Tuesday's broadcast as space allows. You are invited to send in your opinions, pro and con. The letters should be mailed to Department A, Town Hall, New York 18, N.Y., not later than Thursday following the program. It is understood that we may publish any letters or comments received.



IS GAMBLING WRONG?

Is gambling morally wrong? Being in the liquor business, I think there (is a similarity). If not overdone, it can be relaxing and pleasant. If done excessively, it can be ruinous. I can't see how gambling can be wrong per se if churches sanction it and states allow it. — CHARLIE FRIEDMAN, Louisville, Ky.

Gambling, whether it is a sin in itself or not, does nothing but create sinfulness. It robs many, is beneficial to only a few, contributes towards idleness and unproductiveness, and is the foundation for many more sins.—MRS. RICHARD H. BECKER, Lincoln, Neb.

LEGALIZED GAMBLING

Theoretically, the 18th Amendment, putting liquor out of busi-

ness, was a good thing; but practically, it was the worst law ever passed because it put the bootlegger in business and for the first time made crime profitable. Witness the "rich rats" now shown up by the Kefauver Committee. That is when they got their start. . . .

In my opinion, if enough people want to gamble to cause the present situation to exist, no way can be found to correct it except to give them what they want. If they don't get it honestly, they will get it dishonestly. . . . As Lincoln Steffans said in one of his articles commenting on graft in public life, "Whenever you see wholesale graft, there is an unpopular and foolish law back of it." . . .

We complicate these moot questions by injecting moral issues into them. It is a simple business-like

problem—just give the people what they want.—ALFRED MULLER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

I was glad to hear several strong arguments against betting. . . . Attempts to convince us that legalized gambling would succeed . . . should be counteracted by historical facts and by more education as to what gambling really is—getting something for nothing and immaturely trying to support a cause or government by painless craft. If we believe in a new college or hospital or the United States of America, we should be adult and honest and pay our share without kidding ourselves we might get a new auto for 25 cents!—PHYLLIS K. SELLERS, Shrub Oak, N. Y.

Personally I do not approve of gambling as most steady gamblers cannot afford the habit. But since people continue to gamble regardless of the final effect it has on their lives, then I believe the Government should collect the tax due it from these bets.—MRS. ROBERT STAUFENBERG, Baltimore, Md.

It is my opinion that it will be a misfortune to legalize gambling. . . . To legalize a sop to man's weakness is to lower our high standard of conduct (already suffering a debased condition). Let us not lower a standard to fit man; let us inspire man to climb toward a higher level. Let the people put away their gambling games and grow up.—A. LANG, New York City.

Legalized gambling . . . is the line of least resistance. . . . It is not only a poor solution—it is worse than no solution. Mr. Whitman suggested that we make gambling "respectable" by legalizing

it. The leopard doesn't change his spots because we throw a robe over him. The ostrich's head is still there even though he buries it in the sand. Vice cannot become virtue just because we change its name. By this reasoning, we could legalize murder if enough people decided to become murderers. This line of reasoning could abolish all moral law. . . . Let us enforce our gambling laws and set about educating our people as to the true nature of gambling. Let us point out that even a little gambling is a dangerous thing. The Raffle ticket and the punch board and the chain letter and the bingo game are to crime what the seed is to the tree—both the embryo and the fruit.—MRS. R. S. MILLER, Tampa, Fla.

CONSTRUCTIVE GAMBLING

Congressional investigations, indicting and punishing professional gamblers, exercising Federal control over all communications systems, and other such activities will not solve the problem because ingrained in human nature is the desire to gamble and to take a chance. . . . There would have been little progress in the development of the human race without these desires. . . . Without (them) human beings would be nothing more than jellyfish. The solution I offer is a system of education to teach people that they cannot win when they follow a system of gambling that promises them something for nothing. The only way to express the desire (to gamble) is in a constructive way. I mean this as an example. At the age of 58 I took my life's savings and invested it in the building and development of a business. . . . I knew I was taking some chances—gambling my life's

savings in some degree—but I also knew that if I worked hard, studied hard, applied myself, and held on to my faith in myself, I would eventually win by becoming a successful business man. . . . (On the other hand) professional gamblers have established rules which make it impossible for the bettors to win because the game is stacked against them.—W. W. ZIEGE, Louisville, Ky.

NEW LEGISLATION VS. STRICTER ENFORCEMENT

I should like to see the following results stem from the Kefauver Committee investigations:

1. A ban on interstate traffic in all sorts of gambling devices.
2. Newspapers to refrain from printing odds on any sports events except those on which betting is legalized by the state, (such as) legalized horse race betting.
3. A ban on the interstate transmission of horse race results via telegraph and telephone facilities.
4. Closer supervision on a local level to insure that the telephone company and Western Union do not aid gamblers inadvertently by permitting ten telephones in a private residence, pool hall, etc. . .
5. Deportation of foreign born criminals after their second offense.
6. Heavy fines for bettors proven to be guilty of illegal betting.
7. Minimum jail sentences of ten years for anyone convicted of connection with the operation of illegal gambling.
8. Subsequent Kefauver-like committee investigations at future time intervals to check on the status of organized crime.—LES J. HIRTH, Dallas, Tex.

There are plenty of laws to take care of crooks and crooked politicians if the laws are enforced from the top down, and until this is done all the investigations will never accomplish much. We have had a great many investigations, but they all soon die out and are left to wilt on the vine. . . . They will get a few scapegoats, but the real big boys that run the show will get off free.—L. H. DOWLING, Manchester, N. H.

Our hope lies in the improvement of the character of our people, and not in legislation.—T. M. GIBSON, North Hollywood, Calif.

LOCAL VS. NATIONAL CONTROL

The Kefauver Committee might well be continued until local, state, and municipal governments are stimulated to assume their share in eradicating . . . the serious crime conditions.—M. D. MUDGETT, Minneapolis, Minn.

I believe each state should attend to its own crime conditions, but at present it would have a more deep-seated and lasting impression on the people of the country if a continuance of the work could be done by a Federal authority.—FLORENCE M. FORBUSH, Detroit, Mich.

Personally I oppose the state-local level of control. Too much politics creeps into the picture, too many local citizens get their toes stepped on. . . . One cannot fight the efficient machine of organized gambling and their protective politicians with "well-meaning" citizenry, local committees, and the like. Organized gambling must be fought with organization. . . . True control can only be secured through the Federal gov-

ernment. Gambling should be assigned to a body such as the Treasury agents who so effectively control counterfeiting. — WILLIAM W. TERRETT, Seattle, Wash.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Our officials are as honest or crooked as the private citizens make them, and I don't mean men like Costello are the only kind of men who make them crooked. There is just as much done by (those who are) considered good outstanding citizens of the community. They just stay inside the law. My answer to this problem is . . . for every citizen to make it his business to live as he expects his officials to. — MRS. WILLIE JONES, Ardmore, Okla.

Not only should there be an immediate shutting off of the disclosed channels of corruption across state lines, but there will also be need for a continuing Federal Crime Commission to pursue further study for an indeterminate period, cooperating with states and municipalities in what should be their renewed efforts to improve conditions. But I am not optimistic about any early clearing of the nauseous stream because 1) our people have not, by either the educational or religious channels, been awakened to thinking or acting upstream where the sources of crime are, and 2) the people are not yet willing to pay the price in either effort or money — in study that faces the facts fearlessly or in paying for the type of police service so much needed in most of our towns and cities. — LEE M. BROOKS, Chapel Hill, N. C.

(The writer of the above letter is Professor of Criminology at the University of North Carolina.)

PREPARATION FOR POLITICS

I hope that before long anyone running for public office will have to meet an ethical standard set up by the best minds of our land. To be a teacher or doctor one has to prepare himself for the profession and come up to certain standards. Even a mailman has to pass civil service. Why in the name of common sense can a person run for public office without any qualifications whatsoever—only affluence and influence. . . . I believe anyone wanting to be elected by the people should at least come up to the Boy Scout motto: physically fit, mentally alert, and morally straight. — MRS. F. O. GUDIBURG, Stockton, Calif.

Communities (should be) awakened to the crying need for an intelligent program of education for public office, to be included in every high school curriculum. . . . We could make the field of politics attractive enough to appeal to young men of quality, if we begin at the beginning. — DOROTHY L. JACKSON, Palmer, Mass.

SO WHAT?

I am still a little inclined to feel like saying "so what?" in regard to the gambling. Some people are going to gamble in some way regardless of what steps the Government takes, and if they are dumb enough to spend their money that way, why shouldn't somebody smarter have their money? It's not up to the Government to try to protect people from things if they don't have the personal moral codes and the plain common sense to protect themselves by abstinence. — MRS. JOHN HARVEY, Denver, Colo.